

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 IGA-02 A-01 OPR-02
SY-05 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /101 W
-----041301Z 125878 /43

P R 041130Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBQMSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7425
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY RABAT
USMISSION USUN
CINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 1026

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, SS, MR, MO, AG
SUBJECT: SAHARA WATCH: DETAILS CONCERNING POLISARIO STRIKE AT ZOUERAT
E

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 985

1. AS DETAILS OF MAY 1 POLISARIO ATTACK ON ZOUERATE BECOME AVAIL-
ABLE, IT SEEMS INCREASINGLY APPARENT THAT STRIKE WAS WELL CON-
CEIVED, PROFESSIONALLY EXECUTED AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL POLISARIO
MILITARY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY. NEARLY ALL ACCOUNTS OF ATTACK
INCLUDE STATEMENT THAT SMALL GROUPS OF POLISARIO GUERRILLAS SUCCESS
FULLY INFILTRATED ZOUERATE CITY LIMITS FROM THREE TO 12 HOURS BE-
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FORE MAIN ATTACK FORCE BEGAN MORTAR BARRAGE FROM TWO KILOMETERS
AWAY. ACCORDING TO LOCAL FRENCH COOPERANT WHO HAD BEEN BRIEFED
ON ATTACK BY HIS EMBASSY, ONCE MORTAR ATTACK BEGIN,
POLISARIO INFILTRATORS ROAMED STREETS OF ZOUERATE SEEMING-
LY AT WILL THROWING HAND GRENADES AT HOUSES AND SPRAYING
VEHICLES WITH SMALL ARMS FIRE. EIGHTEEN RESIDENTS IN
ZOUERATE WERE REPORTEDLY BADLY DAMAGED IN THIS FASHION.

IN ADDITION, IT WAS POLISARIO INFILTRATORS, ACCORDING TO FRENCH COOPERANT, WHO TOOK SIX FRENCHMEN HOSTAGE BY FORCING THEM INTO LANDROVERS AT GUNPOINT PRIOR TO REJOINING MAIN POLISARIO FORCE OUTSIDE OF CITY. FRENCHMAN FURTHER COMMENTED THERE WERE BLACKS AMONG POLISARIO INFILTRATION FORCE. (IF TRUE, THIS RAISES RANGE OF SPECULATIONS SINCE ANTI-BLACK PREJUDICE OF SAHARANS HAS BEEN REGULARLY REPORTED AND COMMENTED UPON IN NOUAKCHOTT.)

2. ALTHOUGH PRECISE SIZE OF POLISARIO FORCE REMAINS UNKNOWN, LOCAL SPANISH DIPLOMAT REPORTS THAT 50-60 POLISARIO LAND ROVERS AND SUPPORT VEHICLES WERE INVOLVED IN OPERATION. SPANISH STATES CASUALTY FIGURES ARE BEING CLOSELY GUARDED BY GIRM MILITARY BUT THAT UPWARDS OF 200 MAURITANIANS WERE INJURED DURING ATTACK, A THIRD OF WHICH ARE BELIEVED DEAD (IN ADDITION TO TWO FRENCH DEAD). AFTER DEPARTING ZOUERATE, POLISARIO COLUMN REPORTEDLY HEADED EASTWARD IN GENERAL DIRECTION OF TOURINE (2230N 1153W), APPROXIMATELY 100 KILOMETERS EAST OF ZOUERATE WHICH WAS RALLYING POINT USED BY POLISARIO DURING JUNE 1976 "INVASION".
SOMETIME PRIOR TO MIDDAY MAY 1
POLISARIO HALTED MOVEMENT OF COLUMN LONG ENOUGH TO DIRECT SEVERAL MORTAR ROUNDS AT TOURINE AND THEN COLUMN CONTINUED IN EASTWARD DIRECTION (PRESUMABLY ALONG ROAD CONSTRUCTED LATE 1950S BY FRENCH MILITARY LEADING TO CHEGGA AND TINDOUF).

3. AS OF MAY 3, MINING TECHNICIANS AND GEOLOGISTS WORKING FOR SNIM (GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL HOLDING COMPANY WHICH CONTROLS ZOUERATE MINING OPERATION) ARE BUSILY ASSESSING
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DAMAGE TO EQUIPMENT AND TAKING REMEDIAL ACTIONS. INITIAL RESUPPLY OF SPARE PARTS FOR ELECTRICAL POWER FACILITY HAS ALREADY BEEN REQUESTED FROM FRANCE, AND LARGE SNIM TANKER TRUCKS HAVE BEEN DISPATCHED FROM NOUADHIBOU AND NOUAKCHOTT WITH BADLY-NEEDED PETROLEUM PRODUCTS FOR MINING SITE. INITIAL ASSESSMENTS ARE THAT MINING OPERATION NEAR ZOUERATE WILL NOT BE FUNCTIONAL FOR AT LEAST ANOTHER WEEK. MORE SERIOUS, LONG-TERM CONSIDERATION, HOWEVER, IS NUMBER OF FRENCH EXPATRIATES WHO WILL OPT TO LEAVE MAURITANIA IN WAKE OF ZOUERATE ATTACK. DURING FRENCH AMBASSADOR'S VISIT TO ZOUERATE FOLLOWING ATTACK ON MAY 1, HE MADE CLEAR TO ALL FRENCH EMPLOYEES OF SNIM'S SUBSIDIARY COMINOR THAT THEY WOULD BE ASSISTED IN LEAVING MAURITANIA IF THEY CHOSE TO DO SO BECAUSE OF SECURITY SITUATION. SENIOR FRENCH GEOLOGIST ASSIGNED TO SNIM HEADQUARTERS IN NOUAKCHOTT REPORTS THAT DEPARTURE OF MORE THAN 40 PERCENT OF FRENCH WORKFORCE AT ZOUERATE WOULD EFFECTIVELY CLOSE DOWN MINING OPERATION UNTIL EXPATRIATE REPLACEMENTS COULD BE FOUND.

4. AT LEAST FROM VANTAGE POINT OF NOUAKCHOTT, BILATERAL FRENCH/GIRM RELATIONS APPEAR TO BE CONTINUING ON EVEN KEEL. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT WIDESPREAD CRITICISM OF GIRM ABILITY TO PROTECT FOREIGN NATIONALS IN MAURITANIA DOES NOT EXIST WITHIN LOCAL FRENCH COMMUNITY. INDEED, LONGSTANDING POLISARIO WARNING THAT FOREIGNERS SHOULD TERMINATE EMPLOYMENT IN MAURITANIA BECAUSE ENTIRE COUNTRY IS WAR ZONE IS WEIGHING HEAVILY ON MINDS OF EVEN THOSE FRENCHMEN RESIDING IN NOUAKCHOTT. ALTHOUGH GIRM POLICY OF WITHOLDING PUBLIC COMMENT ON BATTELFIELD CLASHES REMAINS IN EFFECT, SNIM DIRECTOR GENERAL ISSUED COMMUNIQUE LATE MAY 2 (BEING REPORTED SEPTTEL) DESCRIBING DAMAGE TO MINING FACILITY AND SNIM PLANS FOR RESTORING COMPLEX ASAP. AT LEAST WITHIN SNIM, STATEMENT BY DIRECTOR GENERAL WAS WIDELY REGARDED AS EFFORT TO CALM FRENCH NATIONALS AND KEEP THEM ON THE JOB. ON OFFICIAL LEVEL, LOCAL PARTY NEWSPAPER ANNOUNCES MAY 4 THAT FRENCH MINIS-CONFIDENTIAL

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TER OF COOPERATION GALLEY WILL VISIT MAURITANIA MAY 6-10 TO PARTICIPATE IN PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED MEETINGS OF JOINT FRANCO/MAURITANIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION.

5. QUESTION WHICH REMAINS MYSTERY TO US IS PRECISE ACTIVITIES OF GIRM MILITARY DURING POLISARIO ATTACK ON ZOUEATE. FOR PAST SIX MONTHS GIRM ORDER OF BATTLE STATISTICS HAVE LISTED 1,500 REGULAR ARMY TROOPS IN F'DERICK/ZOUEATE SECTOR, INCLUDING ONE OF TWO GIRM PANHARD ARMORED CAR SQUADRONS AND ONE 105MM ARTILLERY BATTERY. DESPITE FACT THIS IS ONE OF MORE FORMIDABLE GROUPSINGS OF GRIM FORCES ANYWHERE IN MAURITANIA, WE HAVE YET TO PICK UP ANY INDICATION THAT (A) GIRM FORCES ATTEMPTED TO REPEL POLISARIO ATTACK, OR (B) GIRM UNITS ATTEMPTED TO FOLLOW AND SUBSEQUENTLY ENGAGE RETREATING POLISARIO FORCE.

HANDYSIDE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
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Disposition History: n/a
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TAGS: MOPS, PFOR, SS, MR, MO, AG, POLISARIO
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